APPROACHES AND METHODS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

THIRD EDITION

Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers

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1 A brief history of early developments in language teaching

Introduction

By the beginning of the twentieth century, language teaching was emerging as an active area of educational debate and innovation. Although language teaching has a very long history, the foundations of contemporary approaches to language teaching were developed during the early part of the twentieth century, as applied linguists and others sought to develop principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials, drawing on the developing fields of linguistics and psychology. This led to a succession of proposals for what were thought to be more effective and theoretically sound language teaching methods. Language teaching in the twentieth century was characterized at different times by change and innovation and by the development of competing language teaching ideologies. The impetus for change in approaches to language teaching is generally a response to increased demand for speakers of second and foreign languages. World War II, for example, prompted the need for new ways of teaching oral skills in foreign languages, as we discuss in Chapter 4. Large-scale movement of people through immigration as well as the internationalization of education since the 1950s also created a demand for new types of language programs. And in more recent times, globalization, the rise of the Internet, and the global spread of English has also prompted a reassessment of language teaching policies and practices. This chapter, in briefly reviewing the history of language teaching methods, provides a background for the discussion of past and present methods and suggests the issues we will refer to in analyzing these methods.

The emergence of methods

Efforts to improve the effectiveness of language teaching have often focused on changes in teaching methods. Throughout history such changes have reflected changes in the goals of language teaching, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study; they have also reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning. The method concept in teaching – the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning – is a powerful though controversial one, and the quest for better methods was a preoccupation of many teachers and applied linguists

developed into the British, or Oral Approach to teaching English as a foreign language, which emphasized the need to grade language items according to difficulty and to teach language through a focus on its core structures and grammar (see Chapter 3). Subsequent developments led to Audiolingualism (Chapter 4) in the United States and Situational Language Teaching (Chapter 3) in Britain.

However, what assumptions underlie the concept of *method* in language teaching as it emerged as a significant educational issue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? We have seen from this historical survey some of the questions that prompted innovations and new directions in language teaching in the past:

1. What should the goals of language teaching be? Should a language course try to teach conversational proficiency, reading, translation, or some other skill?
2. What is the basic nature of language, and how will this affect the way we teach it?
3. What are the principles for the selection of language content in language teaching?
4. What principles of organization, sequencing, and presentation best facilitate learning?
5. What should the role of the first language or languages be?
6. What language acquisition processes do learners use in mastering a language, and can these be incorporated into a method?
7. What teaching techniques and activities work best and under what circumstances?

Particular teaching approaches and methods differ in the way they have addressed these issues from the late nineteenth century to the present, as we shall see throughout this book. The Direct Method can be regarded as the first language teaching method to have caught the attention of teachers and language teaching specialists, and it offered a methodology that appeared to move language teaching into a new era. It marked the beginning of what we can refer to as the "methods era."

The methods era

One of the lasting legacies of the Direct Method was the notion of "method" itself. The controversy over the Direct Method was the first of many debates over how second and foreign languages should be taught. The history of language teaching throughout much of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century saw the rise and fall of a variety of language teaching approaches and methods, the major examples of which are described in this book. The distinction between an approach and a method will be covered in depth in Chapter 2; for the purposes of this chapter, however, the terms are used indistinguishably. Common to most approaches and methods are the following assumptions:

- An approach or method refers to a theoretically consistent set of teaching procedures that define good practice in language teaching.
- Particular approaches and methods, if followed precisely, will lead to more effective levels of language learning than alternative ways of teaching.
- Teacher training should include preparing teachers to understand and use the best available language teaching methods.

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Part II   *Current approaches and methods*

The chapters in Part II bring the description of approaches and methods up to the present time and describe some of the directions mainstream language teaching has followed since the emergence of communicative methodologies in the 1980s.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which we examine in Chapter 5, marks the beginning of a major paradigm shift within language teaching in the twentieth century, one whose ramifications continue to be felt today. The general principles of CLT are still widely accepted in language teaching today, although as we demonstrate in this chapter, these principles have been open to various interpretations, and those favoring the approach may weigh the value of fluency and accuracy in different ways. Aspects of CLT may also be used to support other approaches and methods. In Chapter 6, we consider Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The first (CBI) can be regarded as a logical development of some of the core principles of CLT, particularly those that relate to the role of meaning in language learning. Because CBI provides an approach that is particularly suited to prepare ESL students to enter elementary, secondary, or tertiary education, it is widely used in English-speaking countries around the world, particularly in the United States. CLIL, a related approach, has become popular in Europe; both approaches involve a merging of content and language. In Chapter 7, we look at the Whole Language movement that developed in the 1980s as a response to teaching the language arts. As an approach aimed at younger learners, it may be contrasted with the more modern-day CBI and CLIL.

Chapters 8 through 11 examine, like CBI, CLIL, and Whole Language, a number of other special-purpose approaches, in the sense that they have specific goals in mind or reflect principles of language learning that have a more limited application. In Chapter 8, we describe Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), standards, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), all reflecting the outcomes movement that has become increasingly important in recent years as programs strive for accountability and a focus on standards in teaching and learning. In Chapter 9, we look at Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), an approach that aims to replace a conventional language-focused syllabus with one organized around communicative tasks as units of teaching and learning. In Chapter 10, we present Text-Based Instruction (TBI), an approach that derives from genre theory and emphasizes the importance of spoken and written texts in teaching. In Chapter 11, we review the Lexical Approach, which developed in the 1990s and sees multi-word lexical units, or "chunks," as the basic building blocks of language proficiency.

The final two chapters describe teaching approaches that are derived from particular theories of learners and learning, theories that have been applied across the curriculum and which were not developed specifically as the basis for teaching languages. In Chapter 12, we describe Multiple Intelligences, a learner-centered view of learning that focuses on the

Appendix: Comparison of approaches and methods

Chapter and method	Key characteristics	Influence on current language teaching	Teacher role	Learner role	Common classroom activities

3
The Oral Approach / Situational Language Teaching
	• More scientific approach to vocabulary selection
	• Grammar seen as "sentence patterns," systematically categorized to form the basis of teaching
	• Target language is the language of instruction
	• Emphasis on spoken language
	• Language is introduced through situations
	• Automatic use of sentence patterns
	• Teacher control
		• Emphasis on target language as the language of instruction
		• Use of PPP
			• Expert
			• Linguist
			• Guide
				• Recipient
				• Imitator
					• Guided repetition and substitution activities:
					  o choral repetition
					  o dictation
					  o drills
					  o controlled oral-based reading and writing tasks